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Why “Proven” Marketing Methods Produce Failure

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Marketing Law I: *Almost everything changes*. Your marketplace is dynamic—not static—so the past is a poor guide to the future. It’s a crying shame, but the truth. What I learned in grad school back in the 70s was taught by professors who had made their bones in the 50s or even earlier. And my first marketing boss was 30 years older than me. Hence the physics principle: *Only that which changes remains true*.

The methods you use to get and sustain business must change when the marketplace changes. To survive, you must have a dynamic approach to marketing. Doing the same thing you’ve always done will not produce the same results, because the world around you is comprised of customers, competitors, technology, resources and economic conditions that are constantly changing. There are damned few immutable laws of marketing.

So how do you approach your markets? With a combination of adaptation and adherence to the one immutable law that can be replicated: *Customer satisfaction*.

Achieving this Holy Grail is easier said than done. It begins by making your *constantly changing* customers aware of your services or products in a *constantly changing* marketplace. That means what you sell and the way you present it must also *constantly change*.

So if your marketing and sales leaders faithfully apply traditional marketing wisdom to dynamic circumstances, guess what will happen?

Counter intuitively, getting customers the way you’ve always gotten them will ultimately imperil your company. Competitors that adapt faster to evolving reality will take your business. That actually is a constant business law and one that we see all around us in all industries.

Ask yourself how dynamic is your own business environment? Are your customers asking different questions? Are your competitors behaving differently (and driving better cars than you)? Has the technology you use changed? Overall economic conditions? If so, it’s time to make a searching reexamination of what’s going on in your marketplace—and how your company can thrive. It wasn’t long ago that Yahoo! was the search leader, then Google was invented. Facebook was only something in a college kid’s head.

The rules of change also affect non-tech industries. But tech drives a lot of change. Are there still architects or structural engineers around who don’t use Building Information Modeling software? There used to be photo shops around that charged a lot of money to alter photographs. That industry has evaporated and a “photo shop” is in every PC or Mac. Modern dentists don’t need laboratories any more to make crowns or develop images of your teeth. Digital technology allows them to instantly shoot photos and make crowns in their offices while you wait.

Is every new marketing technology or method just a flavor of the month? Flash in the pan? A waste of money and time? It’s hard to tell until they are tested. How long did it take

your firm to adapt to integrated marketing communications? Vertical marketing? The Web? Online search? Social networking? Virtual presentations? Handheld computing?

Far too often, marketing planning consists of companies plugging new numbers into a marketing budget based on an old formula that has been used and re-used. Senior executives as well as marketing execs often spend too much time in their own silos, following old routines, unaware of changing circumstances. It would make a great Dilbert cartoon.

So what marketing methods are best for 2011? The better question is whether you're going to cling to the methods you've been using in 2010, 2009...2000 in the hyper-change world you're living in. When is the last time you thoroughly researched your marketplace? What's going on out there? That's a good first step. Then you can calibrate a strategy that will work—at least for now. Good luck out there in the New Year!